

**Narrating Identity in  
Jeffrey Eugenides’  
*Middlesex***

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English 399b: Senior Conference  
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Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* is the first person narrative of Cal, an individual who has lived a "mythical life" (Eugenides 424) and experienced the "impossible" (Eugenides 516) and whose narrative is described as "this singular and uncommon record" (Eugenides 512). Cal's story is that of one of the so-called "others" in society, and yet, his narrative is a search for origin and a journey of self-discovery in which the social constructions of normality and otherness are revealed. As Cal points out, "I was beginning to understand something about normality. Normality wasn't normal. It couldn't be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone" (Eugenides 446). Cal's narrative demonstrates that though categories may contribute to one's identity, no single category is capable of determining everything about one's experiences, which are entirely one's own and no one else's. In other words, categories are constructed though not independent of one another and have material consequences. This understanding of categories is why there can be no "typical" experience, why there is no such thing as "normal."

Eugenides' novel resonates with Michael Warner's belief that identity is meant to change and the alternative of staying the same, of having a consistent identity, is ridiculous and impossible: "Imagine having no discarded personalities, no vestigial selves, no visible ruptures with yourself, no gulf of self-forgetfulness, nothing that requires explanation, no alien version of yourself that requires accommodation. What kind of life is that?" (Warner 39). Warner seeks to set aside this idea of the "other" self/selves, what Cal refers to as the "struggle for unification" (Eugenides 106). He suggests an alternative way of thinking about identity when he states, "But I distrust both of these views of myself as other. What if I were to stop saying 'It was another life'?"

What if that life and this one are not so clearly opposed?" (Warner 39). In the search for origin that exists within the narrative, Cal demonstrates that identity is fluid, changing with every experience and that one can be "other" even to oneself. According to Cal, "We're all made up of many parts, other halves. Not just me" (Eugenides 440). Cal's narrative not only establishes a space for the "other" but for the "impossible" (Eugenides 516).

This essay explores how the structure of the narrative in *Middlesex* influences Cal the narrator's ability to articulate the inevitability of otherness, and consequently, to express the validation of sexual desire through bodily experience and pleasure. Throughout the text, Cal is faced with not only the "struggle for unification" (Eugenides 106) but with the problem of putting experience into language. The reader is confronted with the paradox that though Cal considers language to be inadequate to describe his experience, it is the language of the narrative that allows him to communicate his story to others and that produces meaning. As Cal's narrative resolves what dominant discourse presents as the impossible otherness of his experiences and constructs his identity, he is also able to establish a political identity of radical individualism.

Cal's "impossible" (Eugenides 516) life refers to his transformation from Callie to Cal and his ability to accept Callie and Cal, not as other or oppositional to each other, but as parts of the whole of himself, the completion and unification of his identity. In his description of what happened and how he and his family adjusted, Cal writes, "You will want to know: How did we get used to things? What happened to our memories? Did Calliope have to die in order to make room for Cal? To all these questions I offer the same truism: it's amazing what you can get used to" (Eugenides 520). Cal does not

consider Callie to be lost forever; she remains a part of him, defining and shaping his identity. He demonstrates that he can be simultaneously masculine and feminine: “Even now, though I live as a man, I remain in essential ways Tessie’s daughter. I’m still the one who remembers to call her every Sunday. I’m the one she recounts her growing list of ailments to. Like any good daughter, I’ll be the one to nurse her in her old age” (Eugenides 520). At the same time, there is no doubt in the conclusion of Cal’s narrative that he identifies as a masculine intersexual. When describing how he upholds the Greek custom of staying behind the funeral to block the door and prevent Milton’s spirit from reentering the house, Cal states, “It was always a man who did this, and now I qualified” (Eugenides 529). According to Cal, the reality of identity is that it is defined by change and incoherence, that what is normal is “what you can get used to” (Eugenides 520).

Cal’s “struggle for unification” (Eugenides 106) is intertwined with his struggle to narrate his experience, and his anxiety towards language is expressed when he says, “I’ve never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I’ve entered my story, I need them more than ever” (Eugenides 217). Though Cal claims that language is inadequate in regards to describing his life, it is the way that Cal expresses his story through language, including how he structures it that reveals his narrative as a search to not only explain his identity but to discover it as well. Cal’s problematic relationship to language is influenced by his intersexual body and derives from society’s deceptive notion of what Michel Foucault refers to as every person’s “true sex” in his “Introduction” to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. According to the idea of “true sex,” hermaphrodites or intersexuals such as Cal are to be like everyone else in that they should “have one and only one sex”

(Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* viii): “Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity; as for the elements of the other sex that might appear, they could only be accidental, superficial, or even quite simply illusory” (Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* viii). Cal does not consider his experience as Callie to be the “error” that the dominant society’s notion of “true sex” relegates it to be, which is “an ‘error’ as understood in the most traditionally philosophical sense: a manner of acting that is not adequate to reality” (Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* x). Cal’s resistance to having a “true sex” is a direct result of his experience, the truth of his identity as having been Callie and of being Cal and thus, the impossibility he feels of giving up one or the other.

The structure of *Middlesex* presents the reader with Cal the narrator trying to communicate with the reader the story of his life and experiences: “I don’t care if I write a great book anymore, but just one which, whatever its flaws, will leave a record of my impossible life” (Eugenides 302). It is the story of the masculine protagonist and narrator Cal and the feminine protagonist Callie and how Cal the narrator’s story and persona come into being through these “other” selves. Cal the narrator is seeking a complete and coherent identity from the seemingly fragmented and incoherent experiences of both Callie and Cal. However, it is not only the structure of the narrative that is important but the very nature of narrative itself that demonstrates the possibility and reality of Cal’s “impossible life” (Eugenides 302). As Peter Brooks argues in “Reading for the Plot,” “it is the ordering of the inexplicable and impossible situation as narrative that somehow mediates and forcefully connects its discrete elements, so that we accept the necessity of what cannot logically be discoursed of” (Brooks 10). Through the sequence of events that

is represented in narrative, Cal is able to create not only a coherent story from the “impossible” (Eugenides 302) but a coherent identity.

In his narrative, Cal seeks to justify who he is through his experience. Though living as a heterosexually identified masculine intersexual, Cal the narrator insists that Callie the homosexually identified female remains within him: “I feel a direct line extending from that girl with her knees steeped beneath the hotel blankets to this person writing now in an Aeron chair. Hers was the duty to live out a mythical life in the actual world, mine to tell about it now” (Eugenides 424). The story is Callie’s story as much as it is Cal the protagonist’s and Cal the narrator’s. The narrator insists that Callie is still a part of him, and Cal describes how this feminine self is influencing the structure of the story when he claims, “All I know is this: despite my androgenized brain, there’s an innate feminine circularity in the story I have to tell” (Eugenides 20). The narrative that Cal is writing is an expression of Cal’s identity as a whole of disparate parts, and the story is necessary for him to define his “impossible” (Eugenides 516) experience. While thinking about what he is accomplishing through writing his story, Cal writes, “Whereas I, even now, persist in believing that these black marks on white paper bear the greatest significance, that if I keep writing I might be able to catch the rainbow of consciousness in a jar” (Eugenides 297). In other words, Cal’s story is not only an expression of this identity but a search for it.

Cal is an unreliable narrator in that he is looking back on the events in the lives of the protagonists of Callie and Cal; his hindsight influences his interpretation of what happened and his feelings at the time: “From here on in, everything I’ll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events. Here’s where my story splits,

divides, undergoes meiosis. Already the world feels heavier, now I'm a part of it" (Eugenides 217). Meiosis is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary Online as "a figure of speech by which something is intentionally presented as smaller, less important, etc., than it really is; understatement." For Cal, it is his genitalia, which he describes as a "crocus," that is considered to be "accidental, superficial, or even quite simply illusory" (Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* viii), and his narrative not only works to emphasize his intersexual body and the "great fact of [his] condition" (Eugenides 320) but to establish their significance in defining his identity.

However, Cal's unreliability as a narrator is juxtaposed with the fact that he is the authority on his experience. As Foucault argues in the "Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume II," it is the "matrix of experience" (Foucault, "Preface" 338) and the "experience of the flesh" (Foucault, "Preface" 339) that provide Cal the narrator with the basis for an authority that allows him to escape the nets of language that seek to regulate and discipline his sexuality. Though his account of Callie cannot be true to her experiences, what is important about Cal's narrative is how Callie's story is not only intertwined with Cal's but inseparable. It is the structure of Cal's narrative that enables a recognition of the formation of identity and the fashioning of the self as a fluid process of reevaluation and reinterpretation with the moments of the present not only influencing the future but the past as well.

In the opening to *Middlesex*, Cal enigmatically states, "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (Eugenides 3). This introduction of himself establishes the narrator Cal as having

multiple identities and yet who still remains the same individual. Neither Callie, the “baby girl,” nor Cal, the “teenage boy” experiences death. Cal introduces himself/herself by naming himself/herself simultaneously as both Cal and Callie: “My birth certificate lists my name as Calliope Helen Stephanides. My most recent driver’s license (from the Federal Republic of Germany) records my first name simply as Cal” (Eugenides 3). Cal then proceeds to portray himself through a list of categories that he feels are a part of his identity, declaring, “I’m a former field hockey goalie, long-standing member of the Save-the-Manatee Foundation, rare attendant at the Greek Orthodox liturgy, and, for most of my adult life, an employee of the U.S. State Department” (Eugenides 3). Through these identities which seem familiar to the reader in that they are identifications based on religion and employment, Cal the narrator establishes the multiplicity and normalcy of his identity.

However, as Cal’s list progresses, it becomes more complex as he attempts to collapse his life into the mythic and the autobiographical. First, he compares himself to Tiresias, the Greek mythical figure who has been both a man and a woman, when he claims, “Like Tiresias, I was first one thing and then the other” (Eugenides 3). The comparison to the prophetic Tiresias suggests that Cal is somehow “other” to human beings, but the reader sympathizes with the Cal who is described next and has been “ridiculed by classmates” (Eugenides 3). He shows how he was treated as an object and a scientific specimen to be studied when he was “guinea-pigged by doctors, palpated by specialists, and researched by the March of Dimes” (Eugenides 3). Cal’s relationships with “a redheaded girl from Grosse Pointe” and “her brother” relegate her to the role of beloved, the object of love and not the lover (Eugenides 3). Cal the narrator does not refer

to himself as “who” but as “what”: “not knowing what I was” (Eugenides 3). The mythic and autobiographical come together in Cal’s final sentence when he writes, “An army tank led me into urban battle once; a swimming pool turned me into a myth; I’ve left my body in order to occupy others – and all this happened before I turned sixteen” (Eugenides 3). The significance of conflating the mythic and the autobiographical elements in the narrative is that through these mechanisms the ambiguous “other” that is a part of Cal is being incorporated into the social structure as opposed to being isolated and excluded from it. Cal is resistant to the idea of being “shut away” and insists that it is the “other” that is “to be collected together into identities” (Foucault, *The Order of Things* xxiv). Cal discards nothing and acknowledges his vestigial selves in order to form a complete identity.

Cal the narrator’s claim that he was “first one thing and then the other” (Eugenides 3) is referring to the fact that because of the changing facticity of his body, he was raised as Callie, a girl, and now is living as Cal, a man. Cal’s emphasis on the significance of the body resonates with Michel Foucault’s “Introduction” to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*:

...we also admit that it is in the area of sex that we must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual, that it is there that we can best discover what he is and what determines him. And if it was believed for centuries that it was necessary to hide sexual matters because they were shameful, we now know that it is sex itself which hides the most secret parts of the individual: the structure of his fantasies, the roots of his ego, the forms of his relationship to reality. At the bottom of sex, there is truth. (Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* xi)

Thus, in the narrative, Cal examines and interprets the details of Callie and Cal's bodily experiences in order to discover the truth regarding his identity. According to Cal, he was diagnosed as a "male pseudohermaphrodite" (Eugenides 413) by Dr. Peter Luce, who was considered to be "the world's leading authority on human hermaphroditism" (Eugenides 409). A male pseudohermaphrodite is "genetically male but appearing otherwise, with 5-alpha-reductase deficiency syndrome" (Eugenides 413). However, it is not only Cal's ambiguous gender and sexual identity that has defined his experience but Callie's feminine life and Cal's masculine life. As Cal points out, "Unlike other so-called male pseudo-hermaphrodites who have been written about in the press, I never felt out of place being a girl. I still don't feel entirely at home among men. Desire made me cross over to the other side, desire and the facticity of my body" (Eugenides 479). The desire to which Cal is referring is Callie's desire for women which continues as Cal's desire for women. Not only does Cal want to explore his desire through the performance of masculinity, but he is also looking to escape the stigma that accompanies lesbianism. Though Cal's phrase "the facticity of my body" (Eugenides 479) suggests that his decision is based on an inexorable logic, the reality is that his body is not independent from the cultural meanings and appearances that exist in regards to gender and sexuality.

As the narrative continues towards its conclusion, Cal tells us his story, showing us how he can be "first one thing and then the other" (Eugenides 3). Cal's narrative portrays Callie's infancy, childhood, and adolescence and depicts her experiences as defined by the facticity of her body and her desires. The baby girl Calliope Helen Stephanides was born in January of 1960 to Milton and Tessie Stephanides, granddaughter of Lefty and Desdemona Stephanides, and she was a beautiful baby and

young girl: “As a baby, even as a little girl, I possessed an awkward, extravagant beauty. No single feature was right in itself and yet, when they were taken all together, something captivating emerged. An inadvertent harmony” (Eugenides 218). What is striking about the description of Callie’s beauty is that it is not based on any individual feature but on the features being “taken all together” (Eugenides 218). In other words, her beauty is the whole that is created by many parts, which resonates with Cal’s definition of identity as “all made up of many parts, other halves” (Eugenides 440). The “harmony” apparent in Callie’s features, though “inadvertent,” indicates that there is coherence to her physical appearance but that this coherence paradoxically results from incoherence. In this description of Callie’s beauty, the narrative establishes a space for fluidity and change within the framework of coherence: “A changeableness, too, as if beneath my visible face there was another, having second thoughts” (Eugenides 218). The “changeableness” does not conflict with the coherence, and in Callie, the potential for change and for desire and sexual pleasure is represented as being always present.

The problematic relationship of Callie’s body to language is significant to Cal’s narrative. Callie’s “sexual apparatus” (Eugenides 226) was treated as something unmentionable by her family, including her mother. As Cal observes, “Chapter Eleven’s apparatus was called a ‘pitzi.’ But for what I had there was no word at all” (Eugenides 226). This silence in regards to Callie’s body resonates with Foucault’s discussion of the discourse of childhood sexuality in “The Repressive Hypothesis”:

It may well be true that adults and children themselves were deprived of a certain way of speaking about sex, a mode that was disallowed as being too direct, crude, or coarse. But this was only the counterpart of other discourses, and perhaps the condition necessary in order for them to function; discourses that were interlocking, heirarchized, and all highly

articulated around a cluster of power relations. (Foucault, “The Repressive Hypothesis” 312)

According to Foucault’s argument, the silence of Callie’s mother and family should be interpreted as related to the discourse of not only childhood sexuality but to the discourses of sex and the attempts to control and regulate the meaning and experience of the body as well. It is this silence that forces Callie to define her body for herself, and the basement bathroom where Callie’s education regarding her body takes place reflects Callie’s need to define her body and the desire to feel “safe” (Eugenides 328).

When Cal the narrator describes graffiti on the walls of the basement bathroom, he emphasizes the images of bodies, such as the “little men with gigantic sexual parts” and the “women with enormous breasts” (Eugenides 329). Surrounded by alternative possibilities to the male and female bodies, Callie received an “education both in what was and what might be” (Eugenides 329). The graffiti showing “men with dinky penises” and “women with penises” are referred to as the “various permutations” and demonstrate an understanding of the body that is unlimited (Eugenides 329). The reality that is depicted in the sketches of the basement bathroom shows that “what was” is linked to “what might be” (Eugenides 329). The overstated figures of sexuality of “little men with gigantic sexual parts” and of “women with enormous breasts” are caricatures of the male and female bodies that draw attention to the symbolically charged anatomical features with which Callie is trying to come to terms in her own body (Eugenides 329). In the graffiti, the male body is extremely masculine and the female body is extremely feminine. However, these bodies are “doing things, growing parts, fitting together, changing shape” (Eugenides 329). The “normal” bodies do not disappear but are altered

and transformed. In other words, the “men with dinky penises” and “women with penises” are not “other” to the “normal” bodies but variations on them (Eugenides 329). For Callie, the existence of alternative and multiple possibilities offers comfort because it creates a space for all bodies, including her own, and it is not a space that is “other” but an expanded space of understanding the body. Within the space of the basement bathroom, Callie is able to resolve the times when “[she] felt that something was different about the way [she] was made” (Eugenides 330). She is able to determine that her body is simultaneously female and different.

Cal’s body was treated as a problematic body that was outside of language even when he was Callie, a girl. Thus, the naming of the crocus does not result from Callie’s need to distinguish her body from both males and females but from the simple need to express her body in language at all. When Callie describes her sexual apparatus as a “crocus,” she compares it to the changing environment around her: “For that spring, while the crocuses bloomed, while the headmistress checked on the daffodil bulbs in the flower beds, Calliope, too, felt something budding” (Eugenides 329). The connotations of Callie naming the “obscure object all her own” as her “crocus” are that her body is being naturalized by being inserted into the rhythms of nature (Eugenides 329). The fate of Callie’s body is to experience not only a transformation but a beautiful awakening, which is alluded to in its description as “a kind of crocus itself, just before flowering” and “a pink stem pushing up through dark new moss” (Eugenides 329). Callie’s crocus, like the bodies in the basement bathroom, is defined by its ability to change; it is referred to as “a strange kind of flower” that “seemed to go through a number of seasons in a single day,” including a “dormant winter when it slept underground” and “a private springtime”

(Eugenides 329-330). The metaphor of the “crocus” also characterizes her sexual apparatus as representing new life:

Sitting in class with a book in my lap, or riding home in car pool, I’d feel a thaw between my legs, the soil growing moist, a rich, peaty aroma rising, and then – while I pretended to memorize Latin verbs – the sudden, squirming life in the warm earth beneath my skirt. (Eugenides 330).

The “crocus” is capable of producing a multitude of feelings and sensations within Callie’s body, and yet, even when Callie’s “crocus” is not directly generating these feelings and sensations, it is merely “dormant” (Eugenides 330). The facticity of Callie’s body is that she experiences pleasure from and through it in the absence of an object of desire. Though Callie’s “crocus” is sometimes dormant and other time stirring, capable of being both “soft and slippery” and “hard as a root,” it is always “her crocus” (Eugenides 330).

In regards to Callie’s feelings about her crocus, Cal the narrator offers the reader the following insight, “On the one hand she liked it. If she pressed the corner of a textbook against it, the sensation was pleasurable. This wasn’t new. It had always felt nice to apply pressure there. The crocus was part of her body, after all. There was no reason to ask questions” (Eugenides 330). According to Cal, the crocus was a source of pleasure for Callie, representing and confirming the normality that exists inside her body. The crocus cannot be categorized as “other” in relationship to Callie, revealing the conflict and tension that exists between the internal and external realities. As Cal remarks, “It’s a different thing to be inside a body than outside. From outside, you can look, inspect, compare. From inside there is no comparison” (Eugenides 387). The crocus

was the normality of Callie's body and that is why it is "at once the easiest and hardest thing to explain" (Eugenides 330).

In "Inside/Out," Diana Fuss argues that the rhetoric of inside/outside is problematic: "The problem, of course, with the inside/outside rhetoric, if it remains undeconstructed, is that such polemics disguise the fact that most of us are both inside and outside at the same time" (Fuss 237). Though Cal claims that "from inside there is no comparison" (Eugenides 387), the narrative demonstrates that Callie's female identity is the result of inside and outside influences and still remains an unproblematic identity for her though only for a short while. The narrator Cal insists that as Callie, it was more than that she identified as female; she knew she was a girl, "had no doubts about this" (Eugenides 226). However, Cal contradicts himself. Callie's knowledge that she is a girl was based on exactly what later defined her as different: her body:

The crucial feature was this: the crocus didn't have a hole at the tip. This was certainly not what a boy had. Put yourself in my shoes, reader, and ask yourself what conclusion you would have come to about your sex, if you had what I had, if you looked the way I looked" (Eugenides 388).

Callie's identification of her crocus and body as female demonstrates that she defined herself as female based on an interpretation of her body in which she determined that she was not male through knowledge of not only her own body but of the male body as being different and other to the crocus. In other words, the facticity of Callie's body is not merely influenced by social and cultural constructions but inseparable from them. It is also apparent from Cal's contradictions that the facticity of Callie's body is inseparable from Cal's investment in the narrative as a self-vindication of his identity. He argues that there could have been no other interpretation of the crocus and that we all would have

reached the same conclusion that he had. Cal's narrative asserts that Callie's identity existed because of the facticity of her body though when Callie becomes Cal, the actual physical body remains unchanged; it is Cal's understanding and interpretation of the facticity of his body that is different.

In order to categorize Cal's gender, the reader might be tempted to read his relationships with women as the manifestation of Cal's XY karotype and masculinity. Though Cal may be a male pseudohermaphrodite, the reader cannot definitively conclude that his attraction to women means that Cal is biologically male or gendered masculine. The text demonstrates that the relationship between sexuality and gender is indeterminable. After all, Callie's first physical interaction with a girl was not even initiated by her but by her childhood friend, Clementine Stark, who wanted to "'practice' kissing the summer before third grade" (Eugenides 120). As Clementine played the feminine role and "swiveled her head back and forth the way actresses did in the movies" (Eugenides 265), she insisted that Callie play the masculine role, but Callie is confused: "I started doing the same, but out of the corner of her mouth she scolded, 'You're the man.' So I stopped. I stood stiffly with arms at my sides" (Eugenides 265). Callie didn't naturally know what to do and attempted to mimic Clementine's movements, which resulted in Clementine's reprimand and Callie doing nothing. However, Clementine did not make Callie play the man because she knew the so-called truth but because she wanted to be the woman. This designation of roles contributes to the idea that gender is a performance.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler argues that the reality of the gendered body and of gender performance is that interiority is a social construction and a means of policing sexual desire:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject. (Butler 173)

Though Cal the narrator seems to include this moment as a defining moment in the life of Callie that seems to indicate the facticity of her body, it cannot be determined from her kissing experience with Clementine that Callie is merely superficially acting like a girl and anticipating Cal’s identity as a heterosexually identified masculine intersexual. Rather, her interiority is being regulated by this performance in an incoherent fashion. In other words, Callie is an intersexual performing femininity performing masculinity.

Like her relationship with Clementine Stark, Callie’s relationship with the Obscure Object occurred before her knowledge of “the great fact of [his/her] condition” (Eugenides 320). As Cal describes it, “The Obscure Object and I met unawares, however, in blissful ignorance” (Eugenides 320). Cal the narrator addresses the questions that we are undoubtedly asking ourselves: “...did Calliope feel any inkling of her true biological nature? Did she ever, while the Obscure Object passed in the hall, think that what she was feeling was wrong? Yes and no. Let me remind you where all this was happening” (Eugenides 327). When Callie first encounters the Obscure Object, she feels an immediate connection and attraction, and her feelings for her are confusing but certainly

not unheard of in Callie's environment. According to Cal, "It was perfectly acceptable at Baker & Inglis to get a crush on a fellow classmate. At a girls' school a certain amount of emotional energy, normally expended on boys, gets redirected into friendships" (Eugenides 327). However, even within this homosocial environment of an all girls' school, lesbianism is considered to be a deviant "other":

Nevertheless, the ethos of the school remained militantly heterosexual. My classmates might act cozy during the day, but boys were the number one after-school activity. Any girl suspected of being attracted to girls was gossiped about, victimized, and shunned. I was aware of all this. It scared me. (Eugenides 327)

Her fears are related to the external categorization by others of her sexuality as wrong. Yet, at the time, Callie recognizes and categorizes herself as a female who is attracted to other females and not as a heterosexually identified intersexual trapped in a female's body, claiming, "Why should I have thought that I was anything other than a girl? Because I was *attracted* to a girl? That happened all the time. It was happening more than ever in 1974. It was becoming a national pastime" (Eugenides 388). Callie's fear of being identified as a lesbian conflicts with this idea of lesbianism as a national pastime and acceptable sexuality. Just as Callie is able to create an alternative space for her body in the basement bathroom, Cal is searching to establish his experience as inevitable though narrative.

However, Callie's fear about her sexual orientation makes us question Cal as the narrator of her life. Though he may have been Callie once upon a time, Cal the narrator finds himself distanced and removed from his past self; his experience as Callie cannot be independent from his experience as Cal. Cal's narration expresses his desire for Callie's

behavior and sexual desire to be accepted as “normal,” but the fact that he resorts to an overstatement to rationalize Callie’s “lesbianism” illuminates Cal’s desire to reconcile his story with the idea of what is “normal.” Cal the narrator’s expression of Cal’s sexual desire for women as Callie’s sexual desire for women frames his sexual desires as a repetition with difference and reveals an element of continuity that exists between their experiences. After all, Cal the narrator is not just writing to leave a record of his impossible life for others anymore. In a moment of reflection, Cal says, “It occurred to me today that I’m not as far along as I thought. Writing my story isn’t the courageous act of liberation I had hoped it would be. Writing in solitary, furtive, and I know all about these things. I’m an expert in the underground life” (Eugenides 319). Though Cal wants to create an original narrative to justify his identity, Cal’s narrative is also his journey to discover his identity.

Cal’s insistence that it is the moment of Callie’s first sexual experience when she first realized the truth about her body rather than the time of the accident exposes this tension within the narrative. Though Callie desires the Obscure Object, she finds herself having sex with her brother Jerome as Rex and the Object simultaneously make-out on the other side of the room. Cal, looking back, is convinced that at this moment, Callie realized something unusual about herself:

Jerome knew what I was, as suddenly I did, too, for the first time clearly understood that I wasn’t a girl but something in between. I knew this from how natural it had felt to enter Rex Reese’s body, *how right it felt*, and I knew this from the shocked expression on Jerome’s face.”(Eugenides 375)

However, it can be argued that this is a mistaken interjection on Cal’s part, that this realization is a result of his reflecting on his past, that even Cal cannot believe that Callie

didn't know. He wants to believe that Callie was aware of her own body when the reality is that she could not know it was not as a woman's should be. Cal the narrator is aware of the stereotypes of men and masculinity and claims that as Callie, she was just as knowledgeable of male tricks though Cal remains uncertain as to whether or not this is actually related to his masculine identity: "Here's a question I still can't answer: Did I see through male tricks because I was destined to scheme that way myself? Or do girls see through the tricks, too, and just pretend not to notice?" (Eugenides 371). Yet, Callie's experience with Jerome makes it clear that Callie did not "see through" and understand men as well as Cal wants to believe that he did as a girl. As Cal proceeds to point out, he did not actually know what Callie says she did, "Reader, believe this if you can: He hadn't noticed a thing" (Eugenides 376). In fact, Callie could not have been more incorrect; the expression on Jerome's face is a result of his belief that he has just had sex with a girl. Cal is resistant to the fact that Callie was never aware that she was destined to be Cal just as she did not possess the knowledge of her own identity.

However, Callie's attraction to females does not change when she becomes Cal, demonstrating that Callie's identity is not completely separate or removed from Cal's identity. Cal's attraction to girls when he was Callie was not a sign that he wasn't what he believed himself to be, that is, a girl. Callie's conclusion was merely what it should have been, that she was a girl who was attracted to girls. Sexuality offered no solutions to the questions that had occasionally surfaced in Callie's mind regarding her body. Her attraction to the Obscure Object was not a reflection of her true masculine self coming out but only of Callie's attraction to women. As Cal remarks to his most recent love interest Julie Kikuchi, "I've always liked girls. I liked girls when I *was* a girl" (Eugenides

513). Cal's attraction to girls as Callie and as Cal established them as one, the "many parts" and "other halves" of the whole (Eugenides 246).

When Cal the narrator describes Cal for the first time, the facticity of the body and its inseparability from social and cultural constructions is made evident by how others determine Cal's sex and gender. The narrative shifts to the third person point of view as Cal imagines how Ed the barber viewed Cal the customer:

Standing inside the door but looking as though he might flee back out of it was a teenage kid, tall, stringy, and an odd mix if Ed ever saw one. His hair was a hippie's and came down past his shoulders. But he was wearing a dark suit. The jacket was baggy and the trousers were too short, riding high above his chunky tan, square-toed shoes. Even from across the stop, Ed detected a musty, thrift-store smell. Yet the kid's suitcase was big and gray, a businessman's. (Eugenides 441).

By shifting the narrative voice from Cal to Ed, the narrative is able to portray Cal as the male that he is considered to be by the others around him based on his physical appearance. Cal is an "odd mix," but Ed does not doubt that he is a male "teenage kid." However, what Ed perceives and what Cal is thinking are significantly different. Ed is unable to know that Cal is still Callie trying to be Cal and an individual of ambiguous gender whereas Cal is thinking to himself, "What was I doing? What if Dr. Luce was right? What if the girl in the mirror really *was* me? How did I think I could defect to the other side so easily? What did I know about boys, about men? I didn't even like them that much" (Eugenides 442). Though Cal is Cal to Ed, in this moment, the protagonist is Cal and Callie. Cal the narrator's description and interpretation of Cal the protagonist's identity through both Ed's perspective and Cal's thoughts demonstrate that the inside and outside construction of the body and identity are inseparable but not capable of neatly and

mutually defining each other. Cal's ability to pass as a male here is not only related to the social constructions that exist outside of the body but dependent on them. Regardless of how Cal is feeling, Ed considers Cal to be male.

Cal the narrator writes how at first Cal the protagonist performed an exaggerated masculinity and how "like a convert to a new religion, I overdid it at first" (Eugenides 449). However, Cal the narrator insists that it was "normal," claiming that, "it was all a bluff, but so was it on most men" (Eugenides 449). According to Cal, "We were all walking around squinting at each other. My swagger wasn't that different from what lots of adolescent boys put on, trying to be manly. For that reason it was convincing. Its very falseness made it credible" (Eugenides 449). The narrator's claim suggests that Cal is not "other" to the men and adolescent boys. Just as it is paradoxical that males must exaggerate masculinity in order to be males, it is paradoxical that Cal's performance of masculinity is what permits him to be one of the males.

The transformation of Callie to Cal is a gender performance, and Cal's knowledge of how to be a boy is based on the inside and outside facticity of his body. Cal's body is in part structurally male since his "skeleton was a male's, with its higher center of gravity" (Eugenides 441). Though Cal may possess a male skeleton, he did not walk like a boy naturally and still had to learn how to do it. His walk was based on his knowledge of the boys he observed around him: "I tried to keep my pelvis steady now. To walk like a boy you let your shoulders sway, not your hips. And you kept your feet farther apart. All this I learned in a day and a half on the road" (Eugenides 441). Callie may have become Cal, but it is a process that Cal the narrator insists is not as extreme as aging. As Cal points out, "My change from girl to boy was far less dramatic than the distance

anybody travels from infancy to adulthood. In most ways I remained the person I'd always been" (Eugenides 520). According to Cal, his "change from girl to boy" was a natural progression and that the difference between girl and boy, between genders, is not oppositional. This comparison characterizes Callie's transformation to Cal as a part of the whole and Cal as a unified self.

To become a masculine intersexual required Cal to rediscover his body in other ways as well, and Cal tells the reader that "it was in those motel rooms that I learned about my new body, its specific instructions and contraindications" (Eugenides 453). It is not until now that Cal experiments with himself, not with the Obscure Object because they "worked in the dark" and "she had never really explored [her] apparatus much" or in the Clinic with Dr. Peter Luce where they "medicalized [his] genitals" (Eugenides 453). Callie's experience with the Obscure Object was about pleasing and satisfying her, and "it was never [Callie's] turn with the Object" (Eugenides 348). Dr. Peter Luce and the Clinic treated Callie as though she were an experiment and not a human being; to them, Callie's body was something to be studied: "My body had shut down in order to get through the ordeal" (Eugenides 453). The significance of Cal's rediscovery of the sexual pleasures of his body is that he is defining his body through his own sexual desires.

In "The Repressive Hypothesis," Foucault comments on the significance of desire and its relationship to the flesh: "A twofold evolution tended to make the flesh the root of all evil, shifting the most important moment of transgression from the act of itself to the stirrings – so difficult to perceive and formulate – of desire" (Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis" 303). In Cal's confession of the flesh, Cal the narrator refers to the performances of femininity and masculinity and of being female and male as "impossible

demands” (Eugenides 452) that had forbidden his body to experience the pleasure of sexual desire. It is in the realm of “other” that Cal is able to recognize his body:

So it was only now, lost to the world and everyone I knew, that I had the courage to try it out. I can’t discount the importance of this. If I had doubts about my decision, if I sometimes thought about turning back, running back to my parents and the Clinic and giving in, what stopped me was this private ecstasy between my legs. (Eugenides 453)

Cal’s sexual pleasure as a masculine intersexual resonates with his sexual pleasure as Callie with her crocus in that the pleasure is experienced in the absence of an object of desire and from a position of primary narcissism or auto-eroticism. According to Cal the narrator, “that was how Cal discovered himself, in voluptuous, liquid, sterile culmination, couchant upon two or three deformed pillows, with the shades drawn and the drained swimming pool outside and the cars passing, endlessly, all night” (Eugenides 453). Cal’s fulfillment of his sexual desires is not transgressive but liberating; it permits him to know and experience the pleasure of his body. In his moment of ecstasy, Cal finds not only himself but completeness.

In the moment with Clementine Stark, it appears as though Callie is incapable of performing masculinity, and yet, after Callie becomes Cal, his performance of masculinity in regards to his sexuality is not only considered to be masculine but gentlemanly behavior: “They always think it’s the old-school, gentlemanly routine. The slowness of my advances. The leisurely pace of my incursions” (Eugenides 232). To call Cal a gentleman is to attribute a positive, desirable quality to his masculinity. Then again, when describing his relationship with his college girlfriend Olivia, Cal characterizes himself as less than male, that in Olivia’s eyes, he was “as much of a man as Olivia could

bear at that point” and “her starter kit” (Eugenides 319). Though Cal emphasizes his inadequacy, ironically, his condition in regards to Olivia can be interpreted as being the ideal form of masculinity. He possessed all of the “feminine” and “masculine” qualities that she needed. However, Cal also comments on his inability to carry through with the performance; he has “learned to make the first move by now, but not the second” (Eugenides 232). What is interesting is that when Cal was Callie, she was able to satisfy the Object’s desires and needs. It is as though his knowledge of being “other” is what seems to inhibit Cal’s performance of masculinity when he states, “It’s getting harder all the time. With Olivia and every woman who came after her there has been this knowledge to deal with: the great fact of my condition” (Eugenides 320). His performance of masculinity with these women is similar to Callie’s performance of masculinity with Clementine Stark; he does not know what to do and nothing happens.

Cal’s use of the phrase “the Obscure Object” can be interpreted as not only an expression of Callie’s confusion regarding her sexual subjectivity but Cal the protagonist’s as well. It is the intersexual body that contributes to the interpretation of the sexual desires of both protagonists as ambiguous. The phrase “Obscure Object” erases her female gender and subjectivity and allows Cal the narrator to avoid confronting the conflicting meanings of how Callie thought of herself as a lesbian and of how Cal the narrator wants to think of Callie as a heterosexually identified intersexual. It also resonates with Cal the protagonist’s reluctance to commit to a relationship that would define him as “other” in regards to his attraction to women. As “other,” Cal the protagonist fears that he will be unable to satisfy the women with whom he is involved. Throughout Cal’s narrative, we encounter Julie Kikuchi, a woman in whom he is

interested but reluctant to pursue not only because of his identity as an intersexual but because of his past and its vestigial selves: “So it’s all over with Julie. Over before it began. And instead of sharing a future with someone, I am back again with the past, with Desdemona who wanted no future at all...” (Eugenides 272). Cal the protagonist is caught up in his past selves - Callie, the feminine intersexual and her failure to be a lesbian, Cal, the incomplete male and Olivia, the Cal who fell in love with and proposed to the bartender who abandoned him. Cal seems to believe that the coherence regarding his sexuality involves not only his attraction to women but to his failure as a sexual subject as well.

However, it is Julie who moves him to discard the vestigial self of the Cal of “incomplete seductions” (Eugenides 320). Cal describes his moment of sexual intimacy with her as “like jumping into cold water,” something “you had to do it without thinking too much” (Eugenides 514). The emotions that Cal is feeling as he and Julie hold each other are “petrified” and “happy” (Eugenides 514). Though Cal is afraid just as Callie was with the Obscure Object, he has discovered that the fear of being “other” to himself can be a “happy” fear, an exploration into and discovery of the multiplicity of his own identity. According to Cal, “emotions, in [his] experience, aren’t covered by single words” (Eugenides 217), and his experience with Julie shows this complexity of emotions. Julie demonstrates how the facticity of her own body has affected her relationships with men just as Cal’s body has affected his relationships with women when she talks about how “Asian chicks are the last stop” and how “if a guy’s in the closet, he goes for an Asian because their bodies are more like boys” (Eugenides 184). Cal demonstrates to Julie that her identity is fluid as well; she is his “first stop” (Eugenides

513) and might be his last. Thus, they have re-defined the identities of each other, discarding vestigial selves but not forgetting them and forming coherent identities out of these incoherent vestigial selves.

Cal's narrative speaks to the fact that the category of hermaphrodite encompasses multiple, varying cases such as "the webbed-necked girl teens with Turner's syndrome, who had only one sex chromosome, a lonely X; the leggy beauties with Androgen Insensitivity; or the XXY boys, who tended to be dreamed and loners" (Eugenides 411). The category of hermaphrodite is also incapable of holding the meaning of what it means to be Cal, and the reader discovers that there is no shared hermaphroditic experience even with other hermaphrodites who scientifically have the same condition as Cal. Cal's resistance to the collective identity of intersexuals is also a resistance to the political identity of the Intersex movement: "Is it really my apolitical temperament that makes me keep my distance from the intersexual rights movement? Couldn't it also be fear? Of standing up. Of becoming one of *them*" (Eugenides 319). Cal fears that he will be judged and defined by his status as a hermaphrodite and only a hermaphrodite, as "other" and less than human despite the truth that "we hermaphrodites are people like everybody else" (Eugenides 106).

The character of Zora is an embodiment of the political identity that Cal resists. Zora has Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, which as she told Cal, "created the perfect woman" (Eugenides 487). Unlike Cal, Zora is not afraid of being categorized as an intersexual. As Cal points out, "Beautiful or not, Zora didn't want to be a woman. She preferred to identify herself as a hermaphrodite. She was the first one I met. The first person like me. Even back in 1974 she was using the term 'intersexual,' which was rare

then” (Eugenides 487-8). Zora is not ashamed of her gender identity, and Cal describes her as inspirational and influential, one of the “centers of energy” (Eugenides 488) before movements emerge. She educated Cal and looked upon him as someone involved in the political movement: “Though we looked nothing alike, Zora was always emphatic about our solidarity. We were up against the same prejudices and misunderstandings” (Eugenides 492). Cal’s emphasis on the fact that he and Zora “looked nothing alike” reveals his belief that it is the physical body that defines their differences, not only in appearance but experience as well.

Cal emphasizes the differences that existed between Zora and himself/herself. Though he was “gladdened” by the feelings of solidarity expressed by Zora, Cal never felt “sisterly” around her (Eugenides 492). Cal notes how he “was always aware of her figure under the robe” (Eugenides 492). On the surface of Zora’s body, on the outside, Zora seems to be undeniably female: “Even unclothed, Zora appeared to be all woman. There was no visible sign that she possessed neither womb nor ovaries” (Eugenides 487). Though Zora and Cal are both XY, Cal’s body bears no resemblance to Zora’s ideal feminine body. Zora possesses the ability to pass as undoubtedly female but makes the conscious choice to reveal the truth; she wants people to know. According to Zora, “We’re what’s next” (Eugenides 490). Zora continues to believe that the problem with intersexuals only exists outside of them as opposed to the reality of inside and outside as inseparable. Cal’s problem with Zora’s activism is that it does not acknowledge difference such as that which existed between Cal and Zora themselves. Zora’s politics assumed an intimacy and camaraderie among intersexuals that Cal resists. Zora wants to normalize intersexuality by establishing a cohesive collective identity whereas as Cal is

looking to preserve difference to avoid what he fears as the inevitable process that would subsume difference into hierarchy. Thus, Cal's narrative is not only "a record of [his] impossible life" (Eugenides 302) but a rejection of the shared political identity that Zora has offered him.

It is significant that Cal does not question Zora's authority: "At my age then, I wasn't much of a judge of literary or academic quality, but Zora's learning was real. She had gone into her subject and had much of it by heart" (Eugenides 490). Though Cal's and Zora's knowledge is based on experience and Cal's narrative resonates with Zora's writing, he believes that he does not share her experience as an intersexual. Cal acknowledges that not only is his narrative a shared intimacy with the reader but that it is one that can be interpreted as an expressive act of the personal becoming the political: "Still, you can do only what you're able. If this story is written only for myself, so be it. But it doesn't feel that way. I feel you out there, reader. This is the only kind of intimacy I'm comfortable with. Just the two of us, here in the dark" (Eugenides 319). However, though the reader may be familiar with Cal's story, the reader's experience is never Cal's just as Cal's is never the reader's.

In Cal's narrative, it is the acceptance of difference that produces intimacy, and at the conclusion of *Middlesex*, Cal remains an unstable character who has embraced a politics of difference and radical individualism. Cal describes himself as having "lost track after a while, happy to be home, weeping for my father, and thinking about what was next" (Eugenides 529). He is unstable in that the phrase "thinking about what was next" recognizes the potential for change that characterizes his identity and, to return to the argument of Michael Warner, that makes him normal. According to Cal, experience is

the source of authority, and his narrative demonstrates that language is capable of not only constructing identity but of expressing a multiplicity and complexity of meanings. Just as Cal can be masculine and feminine, he is able to be both “happy to be home” (Eugenides 529) and sad, “weeping for [his] father” (Eugenides 529); not to be “first one thing and then the other” (Eugenides 3) but to be one thing and the other simultaneously. Cal’s narrative is an acknowledgement and acceptance of the “other” within himself as inevitable and as a completion of his identity. However, the narrative extends beyond himself to the reader, demonstrating that to accept Cal’s narrative is to accept the possibility of otherness not only within his story but within ourselves. Despite the radical individualism that Cal embraces, intimacy remains a necessary part of the narrative as represented by Cal’s familial relationships and the romantic, physical intimacy with Julie Kikuchi. Cal’s redefinition of “other” has resulted in a redefinition of intimacy in which multiple individuals can be parts of a whole just as the other individuals in his narrative have shaped his identity. Thus, the narrative of *Middlesex* demonstrates that the politics of difference and radical individualism is defined by not only the individual personal experience but the reality of the difference and individualism that exists within others.

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